

**Inspection of Midlothian Council Adoption Service
Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services****1 Purpose of Report**

This report outlines the outcome of the above announced inspection as carried out by the Care Inspectorate on 17 November 2017.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Adoption Service is co-located with other children's services teams at 7 Eskdail Court, Dalkeith and provides an adoption service for children and young people aged 0-18 years, and their families, who are assessed as in need of this service.

2.2 The Care Inspectorate is the independent scrutiny and improvement body for care and children's services and they inspect every registered care service, and local authority social work departments on a regular basis to make sure that providers are meeting standards required and are working to improve the quality of care for everyone. Every time they inspect these services they produce an inspection report.

2.3 Based on the findings of this inspection the Care Inspectorate awarded the following grades:

Quality of Care and Support	Grade 4 – Good
Quality of Staffing	Not assessed
Quality of Management and Leadership	Grade 4 – Good

2.4 The report and grades represent the Care Inspectorate's assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during the unannounced inspection.

2.5 The Care Inspectorate noted the following strengths:

- The co-location of the service was found to be beneficial in terms of collaborative working practices which should improve outcomes for children.
- Adopters reported positively on preparation groups, the assessment process and training. This tracking system has reduced the amount of delay in decision making for children.
- Linking processes were reported to be robust and therefore adopters felt that relevant information about the child was shared. In addition Inspectors noted positive developments in terms of more robust process for life story work and later life letters.
- The Inspectors observed an adoption panel and reported that the panel was child focused and demonstrated thoughtful and sound decision making.

2.7 The Inspection Team reported that the service could do better in the following areas:

- The loss of experienced staff coupled with the high level of maternity cover has resulted in the service operating with diminished capacity and capability.
- The need to ensure that Adoption Support Plans are in place for every child in particular when placing a child out-with Local Authority.
- The need to raise awareness to ensure that support is offered to prospective adopters whilst waiting for a child to be placed.
- To consider a Midlothian representative attending the preparations groups when they are held in neighbouring authorities to make these early links.

3. Summary

3.1 Midlothian Council's Adoption Service has undergone a review and co-located within the last year. There has been a large turnover of staff following the review and unprecedented high levels of maternity leave. The service is committed to continue to develop staff's experience, skills and knowledge through a robust and intensive training programme.

The Inspectors noted no requirements.

The Inspectors noted two recommendations:

- To ensure that adopters are informed of the full range of support services available to their child. Adoption support plans should be drafted for the matching panel as stated in the services' action plan.
- To ensure that good quality support is provided by the service, a robust staff development strategy and effective yearly training for all staff is required.
- An action plan has been devised to address these two recommendations.

4. Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There are no resource issues arising from this report.

4.2 Risk

The Care Inspectorate regulate all care services in Scotland using the [National Care Standards](#), set out by the Scottish Government, as a benchmark for how each type of service should perform. These standards are the minimum that children and young people should expect when using care services.

If the standards are not being fully met, the Care Inspectorate would note this in the inspection report and require the service manager to address these. The Care Inspectorate could impose an additional condition on the service's registration if the provider persistently, substantially or seriously fails to meet the standards or breaches a regulation. They also have the power to issue an

improvement notice detailing the required improvement to be made and the timescale for this.

Monitoring, review and evaluation of progress by officers in Children and Families is the control measure in place to reduce the risk of failure of the care services and to demonstrate their capacity to improve.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community Safety
- ☐ Adult Health, Care and Housing
- ☒ Getting it Right for every Midlothian Child
- ☐ Improving Opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable Growth
- ☐ Business Transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Performance and outcomes will continue to be measured through the quarterly reporting, review and evaluation process.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The Service will continue to improve its work in line with its improvement plan and the Education, Communities and Economy Directorate will continue to challenge and support the Service in relation to developing and implementing a range of quality improvement strategies.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

In addition to obtaining our own feedback, as part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate sent out questionnaires to Adopters. Four completed questionnaires were returned prior to the inspection. The contents of the questionnaires were used to inform the Care Inspectorate findings and are referred to in the Inspection Report.

The Inspectors also met with five adopters at a focus group and made contact with four adopters by telephone. They also attended an Adoption Panel.

Copies of the report have been made available to Elected Members, staff and other interested parties.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

An action plan has been prepared to address the areas for improvement recommended in the report. The action plan will be screened for equalities implications.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The Service Improvement Plan allows for sustainable development and improvement.

4.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

5 Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

- (i) note the content of the inspection report;
- (ii) pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration;
- (iii) Acknowledge the progress and ongoing work to improve the service.

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Report Contact:

Name: Joan Tranent, Tel No 0131 271 3721

joan.tranent@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Care Services Inspection Report dated 17 November 2017